

MRC Youth Summer Employment Initiative

Description: 2014 Worcester Pilot Program

The MRC Youth Summer Employment Initiative is a unique public-private partnership offering valuable work opportunities for youth with disabilities in Massachusetts. The 2014 pilot program took place in the MRC Worcester Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Area Office and provided youth with an 8 week paid summer internship in a competitive work setting.

The 2014 pilot program was administered by the MRC through the Worcester Area Office and funded through federal reallocation monies from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). A range of competitive employment sites in the Worcester area were found in collaboration with local business partners, including: Assumption College; the Department of Conservation at Regatta Point; Worcester State University; the Worcester Recovery Center; Quinsigamond Community College; the YWCA of Central Massachusetts; Workforce Central; and The Guild of St. Agnes.

# of Youth Referred to 2014 Pilot Program	Intern Guaranteed Hourly Wage	Work Hours per Week	Program Duration
18	\$10.00	20	8 weeks

Outcomes & Benefits

- Valuable early employment experiences for youth
- Positive long-term work outcomes for youth
- Increased independence and self-sufficiency for youth
- Soft skills and peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities for youth
- Written and verbal professional work references for youth
- Exposure to job applications, interviewing and job lead follow-up
- Strengthening of MRC partnerships with employers and business groups
- Development of a replicable transition program model for the MRC

A 2012 Commonwealth Corporation Youth Survey of MRC Transition Works Grant participants found that “learning employment soft skills and having initial work experiences is critical” for transition youth.

Program Features

Through the Youth Summer Employment Initiative, MRC Vocational Rehabilitation Services staff select qualified high school and college students who are seeking employment experience and match them to appropriate work sites. The MRC provides a stipend for each student intern and any adaptive technology or accommodations required to perform their job duties. Job Coaches are also made available for students where recommended.

This initiative follows up on the 5 year MRC Transition Works Grant, which established best practices regarding early work experience for transition youth. Extensive research, has shown that early work experiences for youth lead to improved chances of long-term vocational success. Students with disabilities face many challenges in acquiring such experiences.

This initiative aims to provide transition youth with improved chances for long-term independence and successful work outcomes.

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2014 Program Results: Worcester Summer Youth Intern (Pilot) Program

- The total cost for the FFY 2014 Worcester Youth Summer Intern program was approximately \$34,277.
- The total wage earnings for the 16 student interns who completed the program was \$25,050.80.
- The Worcester pilot program used Easter Seals employment support specialists, at approximately \$576.64 per student and a total of \$9,226.24.
- As of September 2014, two students were offered continued employment. The majority of remaining participants will continue with or begin secondary education, or will continue with high school. Others will be beginning more permanent job searches utilizing their new skills and experience.
- All 16 students who completed the 8-week program received evaluations from their host employers.
- Employers evaluated their interns based on a variety of criteria, such as: work attitude; listening and following directions; accepting criticism; friendliness/cooperation; attention to tasks; job performance; productivity; and punctuality.
- All participants had the opportunity to learn basic work skills such as being on time, following directives, focusing on responsibilities and tasks, and working with supervisors and colleagues.

Testimonials from 2014 Participating Interns

- “Trying to get my first job was pretty hard, since everywhere I was applying already had applicants with experience. After MRC set me up with my first job, I learned a lot about the business world. I now have enough experience going into college that I was able to get a job that goes with my major! Not only that, but I learned so much about time management, being responsible, working hard, and made friends with my fellow interns. They even offered to hire me next summer when I'm out of college.”
- “I learned many things about the workplace environment, and I created my resume. This internship was very helpful to me because I had no workplace experience. Now I can give future employers reasons to hire me. This internship has helped me prepare for future opportunities.”
- “The job was a good experience for me, I liked it. It was fun.”

Intern Evaluation Comments from 2014 Participating Employers

- “Our intern worked very hard every day. She never needed to be told what her job was, she just did it. When we did ask her to do something, she worked right away on it.”
Worcester YWCA
- “Our intern was a real asset. He will do well in school, and his future seems bright. We would love to have him back. We worked on his resume and I was very clear that if he ever needs a recommendation for a job, just call.”
Worcester State University
- “Our intern was an enthusiastic worker, and we benefited from the short time he was able to work with us. He handled all assignments with confidence, enthusiasm, and dedication.”
Quinsigamond Community College
- “Our intern had a great summer with us. She was an excellent asset to have in the classroom. We hired her part time because of how well she performed.”
Guild of St. Agnes Pre-school